

Anselmian Moral Theory and the Question of Grounding Morality in God

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When we ask the question whether morality *must* be grounded in God, it is useful to distinguish several different manners in which this question might be understood. *First*, the question might focus upon whether or not God is the *ultimate* source for moral goodness, values, or standards. However, an affirmative answer to that way of putting the question does not immediately resolve matters. Some conceptions of God's nature, role, or interactions with the natural and human world set out models of a "God of the philosophers," who can be adequately understood without any involvement of religious revelation, commitment, insight, or practice. While conceding that historically the human understanding of God may have developed through such means, such a viewpoint would assert that subsequent to the working out of such an understanding, such religious means become superfluous, not only with respect to the divine nature, but also with respect to matters of morality. In fact, some might go so far as to wonder whether a minimal morality, purified of any explicit reference to God, could not be worked out on bases of common human experience and rational reflection. This is the starker way of putting the *second* manner in which the original question might be asked. This has been quite an attractive prospect, but perhaps it represents a mistaken project, and if so, a *third* manner of asking the original question arises. Might it not be the case that some kind of divine revelation, to which reference must continue to be made, is required for morality to be adequately understood or worked out? One might go even further, framing the original question in a *fourth* way by asking whether a person requires practical engagement with God in order to live, or even to build and understand, a sufficiently moral life.

Within the broad currents running through the Catholic intellectual tradition, one can find a number of thinkers whose works grapple, at least implicitly, with these various manners of asking the question whether morality depends on God. Among them is Anselm of Canterbury, who makes a number of novel and striking contributions to moral theory. The focus of this paper is to bring portions of Anselm's moral theory to bear on this question about the relationship between God and morality. One of the goals

of such an enterprise is to examine key features of the moral theory of an at-present less-often-discussed thinker solidly within the Catholic intellectual tradition. The four earlier-distinguished manners of framing the question provide a useful structure for arranging study of Anselm's own thoughts and writings pertaining to this query whether morality is dependent upon God. This becomes particularly helpful given that while Anselm did possess and employ a systematic moral theory,¹ by contrast to many other Christian thinkers, he did not provide a systematic articulation of it.² Instead, his theory has to be constructed through exegesis carried out across practically his entire corpus of work.³ A second goal is to use this question about the relations between God and morality as an occasion for bringing Anselm's thought to bear on a dynamic common in our own times and culture, drawing out and addressing secularizing implications of the second manner of framing the question; for Anselm cannot only agree that in theory, a minimal morality for human beings can be developed without any reference to God, but also supplies us a number of cogent reasons for thinking that it falls short of an adequate morality, one which could only be developed and successfully lived out through an intellectual and practical engagement with God through Christianity. In effect, considering these questions transforms the medieval monk Anselm into a potential dialogue partner who has something to say

¹ Eadmer, Anselm's biographer, tells us that Anselm, among other things “uncovered the origins and, so to speak, the very seeds and roots and processes of growth of all virtues and vices, and made it clearer than light how the former could be attained and the latter avoided or subdued,” *Vita Anselmi* 1.8, trans. R.W. Southern (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), 13.

² Thomas Aquinas's systematic work provides a typical scholastic contrast to Anselm's, as well as an example of a central Christian thinker explicitly indebted to Anselm on multiple matters in moral theory. For earlier Scholastic authors and differences from their approaches to those of the “Scholastic Doctor,” cf. Gillian Evans, *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³ All translations from Anselm's works here are the author's. All references to Anselm's works provide work, chapter, and page number from the Latin, from either *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. Dom F. S. Schmitt, O.S.B., 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1940–1961), or from *Memorials of Saint Anselm*, ed. R.W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt, O.S.B. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Works are abbreviated as follows:

M	<i>Monologion</i>	P	<i>Proslogion</i>
DV	<i>De Veritate</i>	CDH	<i>Cur Deus Homo</i>
DL	<i>De Libertate Arbitrii</i>	DCD	<i>De Casu Diaboli</i>
DCV	<i>De Conceptu Virginali</i>	DI	<i>De Incarnatione Verbi</i>
DC	<i>De Concordia</i>	Ep.	Letter
DA	<i>Liber Ex Dictis Beati Anselmi</i>		
DHM	<i>Liber Ansemi Archiepiscopi de Humanus Moribus per Simultudines</i>		

both to modern and contemporary secularist moral theorists and to those continuing within the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Each section of this paper examines one of the four ways of framing the question of whether morality is dependent upon God. Talking about God becomes practically unavoidable when discussing Anselm's moral theory,⁴ so I begin with the issue of God as the origin of moral value and standards. Then, we shift to a vantage point more typical of modern thought and sensibilities, taking Anselm's God out of the picture, so to speak, once we have obtained from his thought what we want to think through; namely, a morality based upon the exercise of a natural human practical rationality. The third and fourth part address what Anselm would see as shortcomings of such a de-Christianized, naturalist approach to morality. We shall examine in the third part what guidance and assistance Anselm thinks Christianity provides to human reason in developing a more adequate morality. In the fourth part, we shall look at the indispensable role Anselm accords to God and to Christianity, understood not only as belief or practice, but as community and experience.

I. God as the Ultimate Source of Goodness

In one important sense, from Anselm's perspective, morality must inevitably be grounded upon God because in fact, everything in being (even merely in imagination or possibility), is ultimately and in some manner grounded upon God. Ontologically, God is the origin of all created being, as well as the ultimate source of whatever goodness, truth, justice, or wisdom beings possess. Axiologically, God also occupies and embodies the highest degree of every genuine value. In fact, in Anselm's view, when properly considered, these values turn out to actually be divine attributes. With respect to certain of these attributes (for instance, justice, wisdom, or truth), human participation in those values is dependent in more personal and volitional ways upon the human being's relation with God.

⁴ A short list of works particularly useful on Anselm's moral theory includes: G. Stanley Kane, *Anselm's Doctrine of Freedom and the Will* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen. 1981); Dom Robert Pouchet, *La Rectitude chez saint Anselme* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes. 1964); Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008); Paschal Baumstein "Saint Anselm and the Prospect of Perfection," *Faith and Reason* 29; Phillippe Delhaye, "Quelque aspects de la morale de saint Anselme," *Spicilegium Beccense*, vol. 1 (Paris: Vrin. 1959); Jeffery E. Brower, "Anselm on Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2004); Daniel Rakus, "The Dynamics of Love in Anselmian Ethics," *Downside Review* 421 (2002).

Throughout his works Anselm consistently depicts God as the ultimate source of all being to such degree that like a number of other Christian thinkers he senses a need to account for the problematic status of evil, injustice, privation, and nothingness. God is the Supreme Being, through (or from) which all other beings that exist have their being.⁵ God creates all beings, indeed the totality of created being, *ex nihilo*.⁶ God not only endows beings with their being, but “by his sustaining them, they thrive and continue in their being.”⁷ He is also the source of all truth and rectitude in beings.⁸ “Just as nothing but good comes from the Supreme Good,” explains Anselm, “every good is from the Supreme Good. Likewise, nothing but being [*essentia*] comes from the Supreme Being, and every being is from the Supreme Being.”⁹ He adds that “[e]very quality and every action, and whatsoever possesses being, is from God, from whom all justice (and no injustice) has being [*est*].”¹⁰ The relationship between Creator and created being is so intimately rich and extensive that beings exist in the divine mind even before they possess independent existence of their own (*in seipsis*).¹¹ Created beings are most true, most good and just—are most what they are and ought to be—as they are within the divine mind.¹² For humans, this presumably encompasses not only shared nature, but even an individual’s distinctive personhood.¹³

In terms of his metaphysics, Anselm is a Christian Platonist, endorsing qualitative distinctions between higher and lower degrees of being, and placing God at the hierarchy’s apex.¹⁴ God is being itself, from which all other beings possess their being by way of participation, as well as through causality. In fact, as dynamic unity of the divine attributes, God is the origin and highest of “whatever it is better to be than not to be.”¹⁵ For each of these attributes, God does not simply *have*, but rather *is*, that attribute whereas all other beings possessing that good through participation. Several of the

⁵ M 5, p. 18, DCD 1, p. 234.

⁶ M 7–8, p. 22–23

⁷ M 13, p. 27.

⁸ DV 10, p. 190 and 13, p. 199. Cf. also CDH 2.17, p. 123.

⁹ DCD 1, p. 234–35, also DA 4, p. 123.

¹⁰ DC 1.7, p. 258

¹¹ M 9, p. 24 and 31, p. 49

¹² M 34–36, p. 53–55. Cf. also DV 7, p. 185.

¹³ On this distinction, cf. DCV 1, p. 140.

¹⁴ On this aspect of Anselm’s thought cf. Katherin Rogers, *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997); F.S. Schmitt, O.S.B., “Anselm und der (Neu-) Platonismus,” *Analecta Anselmiana* 1 (1969): 39–71; and my “A Personalist Aspect of Saint Anselm’s Platonist Metaphysics,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 1, no. 2 (2011): 146–64.

¹⁵ M 16–17, p. 30–32, P 5, p. 104.

divine attributes are of particular interest when considering matters of morality, specifically the attributes of goodness, truth, justice, and wisdom.

If all things that are good are so ultimately (though not immediately) through participation in divine goodness, this does not mean that they all thereby participate in the same manner—that is, some merely less and some more. As discussed in more detail below, Anselm distinguishes between different modes of goodness, of which the highest is in fact justice. An examination of modes of truth similarly leads down a similar path, since truth in the will—a distinctively rational mode of truth—is justice, or moral goodness of the will.¹⁶ While justice in (or as) God is not only a unity so simple that it does not differ from God's other attributes, from the human vantage point, participation in justice remains complex and complicated, not least because such participation is volitional, occurs temporally, and involves aligning one's will with God's will. God's wisdom is also in itself supremely simple, but human beings must grasp it through a number of different perspectives, including their discernment of, and alignment with, the providential order.¹⁷ Given all these considerations, in one important sense, for Saint Anselm morality remains unavoidably grounded on God. Morality's very possibility, indeed the very existence of created being, and therefore any goods, choices, or dispositions, depends ultimately upon God. In addition, Anselm's moral theory, with its uncompromising emphasis upon justice in the will, would seemingly require reference to, and orientation toward, the divine will, which embodies and exemplifies justice and wisdom in their fullest sense.

II. The Emancipation of Morality from God

A modern or contemporary secular interlocutor might concede that in the last analysis Anselm's moral theory will strictly speaking be a theocentric one, basing morality upon some conception of God in the manner just discussed, but nevertheless wonder whether it might not be possible to remove this Christian God from the scene, and thereby translate central categories and concepts of Anselmian moral theory into an entirely humanocentric, naturalized morality. To those unfamiliar with Anselm's works, or with common critical portrayals of Anselm by certain Christian thinkers, he might appear a rather unlikely candidate for supplying a basis for a secularized minimal morality. Indeed, when Anselm gets charged by critics of “rationalizing Christian doctrine,” it is more typically in terms of metaphysics and epistemology than

¹⁶ DV 12, p. 193

¹⁷ Cf. for example, CDH 1.15, p. 73. For more on this theme, cf. my “A Perfectly Simple God and Our Complicated Lives,” *Saint Anselm Journal* 5, no. 1 (2009).

moral theory.¹⁸ And yet, merely perusing selected passages from his treatises would lead one, at least at first, to optimistically envision the prospect of drawing a morality dependent only upon human reason and experience from his works. Consider a few representative statements:

In *Monologion*, he sets for himself the following goal: that “nothing be argued for by appealing to Scripture, but rather each point be asserted on the basis of its own specific examination...[so that] by unsophisticated arguments and simple disputation, reason’s necessity might by a few words compel, and directness of truth might clearly set out.”¹⁹ *Proslogion* seemingly takes this project further, oriented entirely by its “single argument, which would require none other for demonstrating itself, and which alone would suffice to prove that God does exist, that God is the supreme good needing no other good, which every [other] thing needs in order to be and to be well, and whatever else we believe about the divine substance.”²⁰ *Cur Deus Homo* examines topics by setting aside Christian revelation, both in scripture and in the very person of Jesus Christ, in order to argue “by necessary lines of reasoning,” or “plain reason and truth.”²¹

Within his treatises, Anselm does occasionally introduce, and even explore, passages from Scripture. But it is very rare to find him resting the entire weight of an argument or investigation upon appeals to scriptural authority.²² If *fides quaerens intellectum* describes the entire Anselmian project, including his moral theory, it ought to be recalled that this formula is not scriptural, but the fruit of Anselm’s own rational reflection on the implications of the passage “unless you believe you will not understand” centrally emphasized by Augustine. In fact, uses Anselm makes of Scripture typically fall into three

¹⁸ For one representative example of an interpreter construing Anselm as “recklessly” rationalist, cf. Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 6 and 49. By contrast, cf. Gilson’s earlier more optimistic view of Anselm in his “Sens et nature de l’argument de Saint Anselme,” *Archives d’Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 9 (1933): 5-52. For additional discussion, cf. my “Saint Anselm’s *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* as a Model for Christian Philosophy,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁹ M *prologus*, p. 8.

²⁰ P *prooemium*, p. 93. But, the rational human mind also “rationally comprehends that it is impossible to comprehend” (M 64, v. 1, p. 75), and arrives by reasoning at understanding that God is “greater than can be thought” (*maius quam cogitari posse*, P 15, v. 1, p. 112); that God inhabits an “unapproachable light” P 16, p. 112.

²¹ CDH *praefatio*, p. 42. Cf. however, also 1.2, p. 50. It is worth pointing out that DCV continues the project of CDH, explicitly providing an alternate line of rational argumentation about certain of its topics.

²² The exception to this would be in his *Letters*, as opposed to his treatises, where Anselm does make such scriptural appeals, not least since he usually writes to an interlocutor for whom those would be normative.

classes: a passage might provide a starting point for rational reflection, usually by raising some puzzle or problem; it might supply a suggestion as to the way to better understand a matter in process of being reasoned about; or, it might provide a complementary and confirming end-point for what reason has worked out independently.²³ Turning specifically to the trilogy, which Anselm explicitly describes as “pertaining to the study of Sacred Scripture,”²⁴ (i.e., *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli*), one would expect to find frequent references and appeals to Scripture. Discussions about God, even angels and devils, are central in these treatises, but there is equal focus on seemingly more specifically human matters: the nature of justice or moral goodness, the relationship between rationality and free will, how weakness or failure of will occurs, the complex architecture of the rational creature’s will, distinction between different modes of goodness, and evil’s ontological status as privation.

Anselm does examine and elaborate on these issues within an ultimately theocentric metaphysics and moral context. His treatments express and embody deep and lasting desires on the part of Anselm (and his fellow monks) to penetrate and progress further into Christian faith, life, and community through application of the endowment of human reason. But again, why would it not be possible to de-Christianize Anselm’s moral theory? Could we not detach it from whatever theocentric metaphysical moorings it originally possessed, arguing that these are mere historical and cultural contingencies originally motivating his projects? Would not whatever Anselm attained by his use of reason now stand independently of any entanglements with Christian theology, revelation, or practice, particularly since Anselm himself at points portrays his own works as deriving the *ratio fidei*, the rational meaning of what Christians believe on the basis of faith entirely on the basis of application of human reason, *sola ratione*? If this were the case, provided we

²³ Anselm writes of Scripture as “contain[ing] the authority for every truth reason infers, since it either clearly affirms them or does not in any way deny them. DC 3.6, v. 2, p. 272. Anselm provides a way to tell if reasoning is in line with Scripture. “If we say something by reasoning [*ratione*] that we cannot show to be clearly in the words of Scripture, or to be proved from them, we know in this way by means of Scripture whether it should be accepted or rejected: If it is worked out by clear reasoning and Scripture in no manner contradicts it—since Scripture, just as it opposes no truth, favors no falsity—by the very fact that it does not deny what is said by reasoning, that then is upheld by authority. But if Scripture undoubtedly opposes a view of ours [*nostro sensu*], even though by our reason it appears to us to be unassailable, nevertheless we must believe that it is not supported by truth,” p. 271-2. Anselm also invokes Church Fathers as a criterion in similar ways in *M preom*, Ep. 77, DI 1, CDH, com, 1.1, 1.3. He also cites, and even discusses the reasoning, of Church Councils and papal decisions, e.g. in Ep. 65.

²⁴ DV *praefatio*, p. 173–74.

accept Anselm's moral theory as adequate, we could then answer the question whether morality need be grounded on God negatively.

Consider one central concept in Anselm's moral theory: that of "justice." This is not simply one positive moral state or merely one out of a list of virtues. Justice is the mode of distinctive goodness specific to rational beings endowed with freedom of will. Anselm works out a satisfactory definition of justice in *De Veritate* as "rectitude of will maintained for its own sake."²⁵ For an action, a volition, or a person to be just, it is necessary that the person will what he or she *ought* to will. It also requires that he or she will this for the right reason, with the right motivation, ordering goods rightly in relation to each other. This in turn entails that, in that process of willing, a person actually wills maintaining rightness of will. Justice provides a coherent norm not only for which actions ought to be done and which not, or what goods ought to be pursued and which evils avoided, or what motives the will ought to endorse and which it ought to reject, but also a norm structuring the reflexivity of the will itself, and its capacity for self-determination.

In *De Liberte*, we learn further that when the will lacks this fundamental self-orientation of justice, this occurs because the person wills some other (actual or apparent) good incompatible with maintaining justice in the will; that is, the person willingly determines something else as more valuable than justice.²⁶ Anselm also unfolds a complexity inherent to the will, making an initial distinction between *will-as-instrument* and *will-as-use*, and later expanded to include *will-as-inclination*. *De Casu* distinguishes between two fundamental orientations of the will. The one, always present, is the *will-to-happiness*, directed towards beneficial goods (*commoda*). The other, not always present, is the *will-to-justice*, directed towards justice, which includes but transcends proper ordering of the other goods.²⁷

Perhaps Anselm has supplied us with all the basic tools needed to develop and follow a morality adequate to our human needs, nature, and capacities. We would need only to flesh-out in more specificity admittedly underdeveloped notions like "what one ought to will" and "why one ought to will," "what the will was given to us to will," "proper ordering," and so on. Fortunately, we are endowed with a faculty needed to determine these matters: namely, rationality. Reason is an instrument of the soul,²⁸ allowing us "to distinguish the just from the non-just, the true from the non-true, the good from the non-good, and the more good from the less good."²⁹ Moral judgment, discernment of values, ordering of goods, and practical reasoning

²⁵ DV 12, p. 194.

²⁶ DLA 5, p. 215–17.

²⁷ DCD 12, p. 255.

²⁸ On this notion of "instrument," cf. DL 7 and DC 3.11

²⁹ M 68, p. 78.

are central to proper function and development of rational, free human beings.³⁰ Could not these activities of human reason, rightly informing activities and orientations of the will, be emancipated from the theocentric framework within which Anselm locates them?

III. The Need of Morality for some Divine Revelation

This question could be reframed: When it comes to lasting developments in moral theory, worked out by Christian thinkers, perhaps one originally needed some revealed truth(s), spurring intellectual efforts to develop and deepen rational understanding. But once that understanding has been secured and articulated, does it not become a proverbial Heroditian “eternal acquisition” for humanity? If any advances in moral theory occurred through rational reflection upon the human condition in light of Christian teachings, can those not be understood, incorporated, applied, and lived out *just as well* by the non-Christian (even completely secular) person as they can by the Christian? Anselm himself seems to suggest such a rationalist interpretation when (discussing the justice a person ought to cultivate in the will) he seemingly equates “the law of God” and the “law of the mind,”³¹ and still more in counseling that in interpreting Scripture, “we ought not to cling to the impropriety of language concealing the truth but rather to seek the proper sense of truth hidden under all manners of expressions.”³²

Serious problems arise, however, for a de-Christianized interpretation of Anselmian moral theory, and I shall shortly raise four sorts of problems. Prior to that, I want to stress a broader point, namely that many important moral matters resist being reduced to concepts or propositions adequately (let alone entirely) understood or applied in complete detachment from the broader contexts and systematic connections, in which not only they originate and develop, but continue to find and offer their full meaning. For Anselm’s moral theory, what he would call the “truth” of key concepts and doctrines remains fully viable only in a theocentric and theologically informed context, becoming less available and intelligible within a purely secularized perspective. In fact, even between those who share a religious orientation, considerable divergences can and do appear, even deep deficits in moral life, development, choices, evaluation, and reasoning. The narrative

³⁰ CDH 2.1, p. 97. For more on reason’s teleology and scope in Anselm’s thought, cf. Cf. M 68–69, DLA 4, DI 1, CDH 1.1, DCV 10, DC 1.6, and 3.2, and DA 17.

³¹ DCV 4, p. 144. One might read something like this into his discussion with Lanfranc about Elphege’s sainthood in *Vita Anselmi* 1.30.

³² DCD 1, p. 235

of Anselm's remonstrance with the abbot who fundamentally misconceived and mistakenly applied monastic discipline (and the abbot's subsequent recognition of his error, repentance, and revised moral practices)³³ provides an excellent example, as could any number of passages from Anselm's letters, biography, or treatises.³⁴

Four problems arise for any secularized interpretation of Anselm's moral theory. Each could be explored by reference to Anselm's own thinking or practice in these matters, although for reasons of space I discuss only one here. First, there are key concepts whose adequate understanding on our part requires retaining a theological dimension or reference. Second, there are examples to be followed and meditated upon which also cannot be adequately understood when de-Christianized.³⁵ Third, for any given human person, a Christian viewpoint is needed for requisite moral self-understanding and evaluation. Fourth, concepts and doctrines drawn from Christian moral teachings continue to be needed in practical reasoning carried out at the level of particular cases, where action and concrete choice occur.

Among other examples of important moral concepts worked out by Anselm that are essentially denatured by attempts to strip away any theological elements or references, three particularly interesting ones would be the following: the determinate forms justice adopts in the will; the disvalue involved in entirely autonomous and prideful willing; and love's scope and value. By rearticulating the essential nature of justice as "rectitude of will maintained for its own sake," Anselm introduces a risk of turning justice into something contentless, or merely formal: an imperative to value justice more highly (intellectually, affectively, and in action) than any other goods, while offering no substantive guidance about what such just volition would involve. If one wanted to reconstruct what Anselm actually thought to be the things that one ought to will, and the reasons for which one ought to will those things, one could certainly glean from his works all sorts of rules, reasonings, evaluations, and orderings of goods, but one would discover many of these presuming, coinciding with, and even expanding or illuminating, a morality stemming partly from classic pre-Christian sources but much more

³³ *Vita Anselmi* 1.22, p. 37–40.

³⁴ This would include even Anselm's own painfully learned lessons about loyalty and integrity, truth and lies, narrated in *Vita Anselmi* 2.14, p. 82–83.

³⁵ There are the examples of the Saints and Mary of course, elaborated dramatically in Anselm's *Prayers*, and with respect to St. Elphege in *Vita Anselmi* 1.30, but even more the example of Christ Himself, mentioned specifically, e.g. in CDH 2.11, 2.18.

an ongoing project and product and a continuity of generations of Christian reflection, practice, and life.³⁶

Anselm explicitly yokes his conception of “rectitude of will maintained for its own sake” to the divine will at numerous points in his works. He tells us that “keeping rectitude of will for the sake of that very rectitude is, for each person, to will what God wills that person to will.”³⁷ This requires of human beings persevering effort to learn, discern, understand, implement, and cooperate with just what it is that God wants them to will. It also bears implications for ways in which we coordinate our own wills with those of others. Anselm tells us, for example: “Those who fill their hearts with love of God and neighbor will will nothing but what God wills or another person wills—as long as this is not contrary to God.”³⁸ So, on the one hand, the value and standard of concord of will takes on its fullness as what God wills for us. And, on the other hand, other concrete contours of God’s will also provide a criterion for determining how far and with whom we ought to align our own wills.

This brings us to the second example. Anselm’s moral theory is typically Christian in revaluing pride (in opposition to ancient pagan perspectives, which regarded at least some modalities of pride as morally good) as one of the most damaging vices, but distinctive in naming and analyzing pride specifically in terms of *propria voluntas*, best (but inadequately) translated in English as ‘autonomous willing.’ In order for the will to be as it ought to, and to will what it ought to—in fact, in order for the will to be as free and as full as it could and should be—it must align itself with and under the divine will.³⁹ The paradigmatic case of *propria voluntas* is that of the Devil, who “willed something (by) an autonomous will, which was set under none other” and even “not only willed to be equal to God because he presumed to have autonomous will, but even willed to be greater [than God] by willing what God did not will him to will, so much he set his own will above God’s will.”⁴⁰ The human will is caught, Anselm warns his fellow monks, between God’s commands and the Devil’s seductive suggestions, “like a wife between her

³⁶ Anselm’s biographer Eadmer, much more often than Anselm, refers to this body of precepts and practice (i.e., Christian morality) as “the Law of Christ.”

³⁷ DL 8, p. 220. Cf. also DC 1.6, p. 256.

³⁸ Ep. 112, p. 270. This theme of *concordia*, the virtue of maintaining one’s will in alignment with other people’s wills as far as it does not contravene God’s will, is central to Anselm’s moral theory, and arises in a number of his *Letters*. Cf. in particular Ep. 143 and *Vita Anselmi* 1:10, 31 and 33.

³⁹ “Every rational will of the creature should be subject to the will of God.” CDH 1.11, p. 68. Cf. also CDH 2.10, p. 111.

⁴⁰ DCD 4, p. 242. Cf. also P 3, p.103 and DI 4, p. 18.

legitimate spouse and some [would-be] adulterer.”⁴¹ The Anselmian perspective criticizes any human pretensions of moral self-sufficiency and self-determination disengaged from the divine will, and accords legitimate positive value to obedience, though not an uncritical one, since “even if sometimes a man submits his will to another man, it is still autonomous will if it is against God.”⁴²

The nature and value of love provides a third example of a distinctive Christian contribution to moral theory. Anselm writes about love in a number of places in his works. Three themes suffice to provide some sense of the role—as properly understood and lived-out—love plays within Anselm’s moral vision. He writes about the value, the transaction, and the permanency of love as a gift, offering the following counsel: “We should always strive more to love than to be loved, and to rejoice more, realizing that we gain more when we love than when we are loved.”⁴³ We also ought not only to do and to will justice, but even to love it. He tells us: “[R]eason, by which we understand rectitude, teaches that this rectitude is to be kept out of love for that same rectitude.”⁴⁴ We also ought to direct our love towards—and into deeper and deeper relation with—God, as he tells us in *Monologion*: “[T]he rational creature ought to devote all of its capacities and its will [*posse et velle*] to...loving the Highest Good.”⁴⁵ This requires that the “human being should endeavor towards that good by loving and desiring with its whole heart, whole soul, and whole mind.”⁴⁶

This raises up a final important point. Once God has been granted any locus in the moral landscape, since God himself is not only a good, but a very great good, no moral theory that does not do justice to that good can really claim adequacy. For Anselm, as for any orthodox Christian thinker, God is not only a good among other goods, but the highest good and the source of the being and the very goodness of other goods. In order to rightly understand, and in order to more fully participate in justice, rectitude, rationality,

⁴¹ DHM 2, p. 40.

⁴² DI 10, p. 27.

⁴³ Ep. 434, p. 213. He gives similar advice in other letters. Love does, however, need to be guided and tempered by wisdom, as his advice to William in Ep. 189 indicates.

⁴⁴ DC 1.6, p. 257.

⁴⁵ M 68, p. 79.

⁴⁶ M 74, p. 83. This must not be understood, however, in a one-sided way exclusive of love for neighbor. Anselm writes to a candidate who wishes to avoid the office to which his community calls him: “I consider it more advantageous to you to preserve the peace of contemplation by love in your mind and the obedience of brotherly charity in your actions than to wish to choose contemplation alone by despising the prayers and the need of others,” Ep. 345, p. 74.

goodness, human beings, like it or not, will have to turn—to convert their minds—to God. And, if they intend to do so fully, they will not only need to will and understand this, they will have to cultivate love for this process and practice, and for its divine collaborator, the Triune God.

IV. Relation with God, and the Capacity to Understand Morality

One mistake in moral matters consists in attempting to precipitate out a secularized morality from an originally Christian moral matrix; a morality exclusively dependent upon, and derived from, putatively natural human rationality reflecting upon experience. Another mistake, once the divine's place has been rightly restored within moral theory, would be to reduce the needed contribution by the divine to merely a matter of theoretical starting points, examples, rules and precepts. From such a perspective, God would supply what is lacking intellectually, or clarify what is deficiently understood, thus enabling human moral reasoning to attain its full scope and potential, by providing knowledge about moral matters. But volition, action, commitments, habits, affectivity, further experiences, relationships, and community, which are all admittedly important, would have no distinctive or essential contributions to make to progressively understanding moral matters more fully. Nor, as far as generation of more adequate moral understanding goes, is it relevant that each of these also provide opportunities for divine and human interaction.

For Anselm, we cannot come to really know God, our neighbor, ourselves, or moral truths without ongoing engagement in practical, committed, Christian living, acting, and willing. God progressively reveals Himself and His will to us, particularly by collaborating in remaking us into creatures sufficiently receptive and attuned to the truth that is continually offered to us. And this occurs not only within the ambit of a single human being's thoughts, volitions, and actions, but also generationally, in an accumulative manner, through a broad, ongoing Christian tradition and community of grace. Accordingly, morality must be grounded on God in yet another sense: it must remain actively grounded on God; regrounding itself continually in the acting, willing, thinking person's ongoing relationship with God.

This is a thematic richly worked out in Anselm's thought, life, and interactions. I would like to point out four lines of exploration suggested by Anselm's texts. Given constraints of space, I shall merely set these out simply as theses, and briefly discuss only the last. First, there are revealing and arresting experiences, volitional commitments, and developed moral dispositions rightly reflected upon and perseveringly lived out, all of which generate further needed levels of understanding, particularly in matters of faith and

morals. Second, Anselm sets out elements of what might be termed an “ethic of the use of the mind,”⁴⁷ noting that a person’s willing choices about what thoughts to turn their attention to—occupy themselves with, explore through contemplation—bears fruits not only for practice, but also for good discernment, and for further direction of the mind.⁴⁸ Third, right conduct, as well as volitional and affective orientation, provides the person engaging in them invaluable indices for developing further understanding and better practical reasoning in moral matters. “Right believing and understanding were given to the rational creature for willing rightly. So, one should not say that someone has right understanding if he or she does not will rightly in accordance with it.”⁴⁹ When we recognize ourselves going wrong, if we sense disharmonies in our own will or between ours and the divine will, we know that the defect on our part is not only volitional or practical, but also intellectual.⁵⁰

Fourth, and finally, as human beings, damaged in our being by the effects not only of original sin but also of personal sins, since we are imperfect both in reason and in will, we require the aid and influx of divine grace, which Anselm consistently depicts as mercifully and bountifully given in so many ways that Anselm deliberately declines even to list the ways grace aids a person to persevere in justice.⁵¹ In some cases, divine grace works in a miraculous manner through the mediation of the saints or yet more directly from

⁴⁷ I suggest this in “Freedom, Inclinations of the Will, and Virtue in Anselm,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 81 (2008), p. 100.

⁴⁸ In M 66–67, we are to enact an imitation of Trinity by engaging in remembering, understanding, and loving God by use of the rational human mind. Cf. also M 32, p. 52. Anselm elaborates a very relevant and fruitful likeness between the human mind and an “ever grinding mill,” bearing on the contents of our thoughts in DHM 41–42, p. 53–55.

⁴⁹ DC 3.1, v. 2, p. 265.

⁵⁰ In DHM 3, it is only when the will is conjoined to God, is it “opened to the disposition of the virtues and to willing what should be preferred [*volendum optanda*], memory to the remembering of things that should be remembered, thought to the thinking of things that should be thought upon, understanding to distinguishing what is to be willed or remembered or thought.” Disorder of the will has intellectual consequences, which then feed back into the will, since the soul “can neither keep nor possess [justice] unless it is understood [*non intellecta*]”, DCV 8, p. 149. One can “be sunken by one sin after another even into the bottomless abyss of sin...so that the good is even turned for him to something hateful,” DC 3.8. p. 275. “Without faith and obedience to God’s commandments...sometimes by good conscience being neglected, the understanding [previously] given,” DI 1, p. 8. “[T]he soul that is weighted down by the body which is corrupted cannot even understand [justice]”, and this introduces a major problem, since that justice “cannot be kept nor had when not understood,” DCV 8, p. 149.

⁵¹ DC 3.4, p. 267.

God Himself.⁵² In other cases, and in Anselm's view this seems to be much more typically how things go in our lives, the grace that offered a human being occurs through a matrix of human-divine interactions, in which divine grace is cooperated with by a human will, providing channels of grace to yet other human beings.

He provides us a glimpse of the complex (and community-mediated) structure of these collaborative workings in *De Concordia*, where he writes of those who believe and practice the faith as sowing and cultivating seeds of right thoughts and volitions in human hearts, which are to then produce further fruit, which bear further seeds. And, “since what develops from grace is a grace,” preaching, hearing, understanding what is heard, and rectitude of willing are all instances of graces. Human collaboration with God takes place precisely through the mediation and contribution of other human collaborators.⁵³ This in turn calls to be understood in terms of historical communities, institutions, and traditions of moral inquiry. Anselm located his own moral life and understanding within such a continuity and communion, and for his own part contributed to returning this gift of divine-human cooperation to us enriched by a few talents more. In the end, from the perspective of the great Scholastic Doctor, any genuine morality not only will have to be grounded in God, but God will also call to be envisioned by us as the ontological source *for*, a preceptor and guide *about*, and our gracious collaborator *in*, morality.

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⁵² For Anselm's discussion on what miracles are, and how different orders (i.e., natural, volitional, and divine) interact and intersect, cf. DCV 11, p. 154. One example of this, working in well-developed human beings is when the Holy Spirit “kindles [the human] mind to understanding why God gives this or that precept.... [A]fterwards it adds even beyond this wisdom, so that one clearly understands through reason what is best tasting [*sapidum*] or delightful for oneself, and through love of rectitude alone pursues what one understands to be what ought to be pursued.” DHM 132, p. 89. Anselm also writes of it being a miracle when God restores justice within a person's will in DL 3 and 10.

⁵³ DC 3.6, p. 272–73 Originally, of course, the “seeds,” like all created beings, come from God, so that “without human teaching He miraculously caused the hearts of the prophets and the apostles, and no less the Gospels, to be fertile with salvation-bringing seeds,” p. 271.